



DHS Today via E-mail

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***Russell Rigsby**, director of the DHS Division of Youth Services, faces the task of providing the best services to troubled youth in the state in the most productive way. In this interview, he talks about some of the challenges facing DYS and plans for the future.*

Today: What are the most serious problems DYS faces in providing state level services to juveniles?

Rigsby: The major issues facing DYS in providing services are complex. The culmination of problems is the lack of proper research and development of a foundation for building youth services in Arkansas. The greatest challenge will be to convince all those who work with these children that the system must yield to a single philosophy and discipline that strictly adheres to the needs of the youth and exactly *how* we should be serving youth.



From a functional standpoint, rushing to gain compliance with legislative mandates created during the 82nd General Assembly will be paramount. The greatest impact was made by legislation requiring separation of juveniles in residential settings based on their age, offense and host of other relevant factors. This single mandate will require the physical system to expand very rapidly and the need for separation can be unbridled depending on the complexity expressed in certain juveniles. The second mandate that will caused rapid growth and require adjustment by DYS will be the development of a program for 18-21 year-olds.

Today: What are the major changes underway in the way the state provides services to juveniles?

Rigsby: The significant changes to affect the way in which services are provided will be to turn this system in the opposite direction. The lack of adequate and effective prevention, diversion and alternative services has generated an inappropriate and ever-increasing population of correction-oriented juveniles. This composition affects the mindset and the actual mechanics of the youth services system. If the system believes that its front-end services fail as a result of mere inadequacy rather than inaccuracy and ineffectiveness, then it wrongfully confirms that something greater must be imposed upon the juvenile to encourage change.

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A central system takes juveniles away from the very point where focus should be emphasized – in their homes and communities. DYS is establishing a system whereby all juveniles are placed strictly according to their needs and the present bed-driven environment will end. DYS will be recognized far more at the local and regional level throughout the state.

Today: What is the DYS five-year plan?

Rigsby: It's a three phase plan to reverse the direction of DYS, dissolve the central institution and begin the drive toward more local services with a focus on prevention and diversion services to reduce the number of juveniles who require correctional services.

The first phase of the plan, a reorganization of DYS personnel and unit functions is completed and the staging for phase two is underway with construction underway at Alexander, Dermott and Mansfield. The second phase of the plan will begin as early as July with transition of the state-operated institution at Alexander to a contracted environment. This process will change services so that an entirely contracted service system will be responsible for all services to children. Beginning in September, Alexander will become entirely an intake and assessment facility. The new building there will provide 10 separate intake dorms to comply with the separation mandate.



In the third phase, DYS will ultimately move to a service arrangement with five distinct regions, each responsible for delivering the entire spectrum of services from prevention through corrections. Dermott and Mansfield will deal with 18-21 year olds right now until we are regionalized. You'll see regionalization ramp up a little at a time. Dermott and Mansfield will transition into full regional complexes. The construction there is being designed that it can be used for one purpose now and another later.

Today: How does accreditation fit into the plan and how will DYS benefit from accreditation?

Rigsby: DYS is not presently licensed, certified or otherwise held to standards that are required to bring unity or standardization. The primary purpose of accreditation is to provide a platform of standard from which this agency can maintain and consistent level of safety and welfare to juveniles under its care.

The important fact is that DYS will from this point forward, adhere to some form of nationally recognized standards in the best interests of the children.

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Today: Ultimately, how will restructuring of services benefit kids and the state?

Rigsby: Generally, the movement of DYS in the present direction will provide opportunity for earlier intervention dealing with at-risk behavior at a stage where it has the greatest potential for success. This will reduce the need to develop more correctional programs that are actually too little, too late for most delinquents. This approach will also open our eyes to better forming and using community resources, and educating the public through awareness of programs in their own communities that can be easily accessed. In short, DYS plans to better understand and address the problem of juvenile delinquency and at-risk behavior at the point of origin and avoid the development of delinquency in as many kids as possible.

LeAnn Edwards, of the ElderChoices Program, says that DAAS employees, once again, joined forces to make this Christmas season a little brighter for some of the elderly clients served by the Division.

“The ElderChoices Program staff began an annual Christmas tradition last year by donating money to the "Christmas Club" rather than exchanging Christmas presents. Last year, we used that money to purchase Christmas food and presents for eight ElderChoices clients. This year, in addition to the Christmas Club, staff members brought canned goods to the Christmas party. By the time all the money was counted and the food baskets stuffed, the ElderChoices Program gave away 12 food baskets and had enough money to go shopping for another 12 clients. These two efforts alone reached three times the number reached last year.



We thought we had done very well this year, but we weren't through. Thanks to presents and food donated by the 6th graders, their teachers and administration at Bryant Middle School, the ElderChoices Program and APS delivered approximately 25 more gift and food baskets to ElderChoices clients and to nursing homes caring for APS clients.

In one busy afternoon, APS staff wrapped presents for elderly clients in their care. Thanks to very generous hearts with the Mitchell, Williams, Selig, Gates and Woodyard law firm, they wrapped \$4000 in donated gifts and met the wishes of every single APS client. All in all, we think it was a very good year,” LeAnn said.

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Debbie Roark said that Lonoke County DHS, in cooperation with community providers and caring individuals, sponsored 465 community children, 39 foster children and 25 TEA related children for Christmas. Lonoke County staff organized the annual event with the Lonoke County Christmas Coalition to ensure no family was missed and all children received their Christmas wishes. They also provided food baskets to more than 225 families and 20 elderly households. They had a great time and once again the staff did what they do best, served those in need.

The Committee on Women's Concerns is holding its 15th Annual Arkansas Women's Conference on Friday, March 9, 2001 at the Holiday Inn-Airport in Little Rock. The theme of this year's conference is G.R.O.W.T.H. II: Growing Rich on Wisdom, Talent and Humor. Registration is \$50.00 and includes continental breakfast, luncheon, admission to all workshops and materials.

The featured speaker will be nationally recognized motivational speaker, **Patricia Fripp**. Fripp is the author of Get What You Want and Make It So You Don't Have to Fake It. Fifteen one-hour workshops will be offered during the day. Participants will be awarded continuing professional education (CPE) credits for workshops and sessions attended. There will also be exhibits with products and services of interest to women.

The closing session will feature **Karen Hardy**, publisher of the new women's magazine "Arkansas Natural Woman."

For additional specific information on the conference, please go to the website: www.arkwomensconf.homestead.com. A printable registration form is available there. If you have questions, please contact **Valerie Davis** at (501) 791-2020.

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Comprehensive Services Plan and the SSBG Program Manual have been added to the DHS website and on DHS GOLD. The publications may be accessed at <http://www.state.ar.us/dhs/> for people without access to DHS GOLD.



SSBG is federal funding provided to states, territories, and insular areas for provision of a variety of social services. Prior to the expenditure of funds, each state must submit a report on the intended use of the funds. The SSBG Services Program Plan is the document prepared by DHS to meet this requirement.

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The SSBG Program Manual is a resource document used by DHS staff and providers of services funded with SSBG funding covered by the plan. With access to these publications on the Internet, hard copies will no longer be provided unless specifically requested. If you have questions or comments, please contact dianne.cooper@mail.state.ar.us.

Roads and planes aren't the only places where people release their rage these days. Long hours and an increase in workplace stress are giving rise to a phenomenon known as “desk rage,” said a recent study by Integra Realty Resources, a New York real estate advisory firm. According to the survey, which questioned 1,305 working adults, 10% said they've witnessed physical violence in their workplaces and 42% reported yelling and other verbal abuse where they work. Another 23% said stress in the office has reduced them to tears. Desk rage is spurred by overcrowded, dismal and unsafe offices, unrealistic deadlines, the replacement of offices with cubicles, ill-mannered co-workers and excessive workloads. Of those surveyed, 62% complained of workplace-related back or neck pain and 38% said their hands hurt by the end of the day. There is some good news. Lightening up the day can reduce stress. Integra recommends taking more breaks throughout the day, drinking less coffee, having a good daily laugh and improving surroundings with plants and better lighting.



Do you have something you'd like to share in the newsletter? Send an email to Joyce.Williams@mail.state.ar.us. You can also fax items to (501) 682-6512 or call (501) 682-6580.